Indiana Native Wanted on Murder Charge in 1984 Bomb Attack on Eden Pastora

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Costa Rica Considers Seeking Contras Backer in U.S.

By Peter Brennan
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SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, Jan. 31—In a case that could prove embarrassing for both the U.S. and Costa Rican governments, local courts are considering seeking the extradition of John Hull, a supporter of the Nicaraguan contras and alleged CIA operative who fled Costa Rica for his native Indiana last year.

A Costa Rican prosecutor recently recommended that Hull, 69, a dual Costa Rican-U.S. citizen, be charged with first-degree murder for the 1984 bombing at a press conference in a Nicaraguan hamlet called La Penca, located across the San Juan River from Costa Rica.

The bomb, planted by an assassin posing as a journalist, only wounded its intended target, rebel leader Eden Pastora, but killed three journalists and at least one Nicaraguan rebel and wounded dozens. The report identified the assassin as Amac Galil. His whereabouts are unknown.

Based on the first substantive investigation by a Costa Rican agency into the bombing, the report links contras, narcotics traffickers of various nationalities, then-Panamanian strongman Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, former lieutenant colonel Oliver North, Cuban-American exiles and Costa Rican officials.

Pastora, who won fame in the Sandinista revolution as "Commander Zero," left the Nicaraguan government to mount an insurgency in the early 1980s from Costa Rica.

Prosecutor Jorge Chavarria charged that because Pastora refused to coordinate his forces with contras based in Honduras or to cooperate with drug traffickers using rebel arms pipelines to run cocaine through northern Costa Rica, a conspiracy to murder him mushroomed—led by Hull and Cuban exile Felipe Vidal. Vidal also has not been located.

Costa Rican authorities arrested Hull a year ago on charges of drug trafficking and neutrality violations for his support of the contras. While free on $36,000 bail, Hull, who had lived in northern Costa Rica for more than 20 years, fled this country, claiming health problems.

The charges of drug trafficking were dropped after Hull fled, This made extradition on the neutrality charge difficult under the 1922 treaty in effect, said local lawyers. But the latest accusation of first-degree murder has brought renewed pressure on the country's highly respected judicial system to seek Hull's extradition.

"I think they have to do it," said Roberto Cruz, a Costa Rican journalist who lost an eye and a leg in the 1984 bombing. "If they don't try to extradite John Hull, Costa Rica won't be a real republic."

Costa Rica's normally conservative newspaper La Nacion demanded in an editorial that the courts follow up this case because there is "an imperative need for justice in this crime."

A letter praising the prosecutor's report was sent to Chavarria by the Journalists' Association, the Foreign Journalists' Association and a committee of La Penca victims. The letter encouraged the prosecutor to push for more cooperation from the U.S. judiciary, despite Washington's "negative attitude."

Republican Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana said here recently that he has heard about the recent charges against Hull, but that extradition "depends on Costa Rica making formal charges."

A local prosecutor in Hull's former Costa Rican province of San Carlos has asked a judge to seek extradition. It will be a long process that could be halted anywhere as it winds its way through the judiciary and Foreign Ministry before going to the United States.

Once a prominent supporter of the contras, Hull worked with North through courier Robert Owen to construct a rebel force on Nicaragua's southern front. If he were brought back, it could prove embarrassing to officials in both countries.

The report stated that Hull was a CIA operative with close ties to the U.S. Embassy and Costa Rican officials. It quoted testimony that before the La Penca bombing, Hull told a variety of people, including the then-vice minister of police, that there was a "need to eliminate" Pastora.

The night of the 1984 bombing, said the prosecutor, Hull called an associate and ordered him not to offer any help to the victims, according to the report.

During a telephone interview from Indiana, Hull denied the murder charges and charged that the Costa Rican judiciary is full of "communists."

Deane Hinton, who was ambassador here and now is in Panama, called the recent report "an invention."

Chavarria emphasized that the report is a preliminary investigation. A panel of three judges is reviewing the report, which is based on 7,000 documents from, among other places, the Iran-contra hearings and related trials and a U.S. Senate subcommittee's investigation into drug trafficking.

The report recommended that 23 persons be charged with neutrality violations, including military trainer Thomas Posey and North's courier, Owen.

North was not charged, but he is officially declared not welcome in Costa Rica, the most stable democracy in Central America.

Last July, a Legislative Assembly commission investigating trafficking recommended that North, arms dealer Richard Secord, former national security adviser John Poindexter, former ambassador Lewis Tambs and former CIA station chief in Costa Rica Joe Fernandez should be declared personae non gratae in Costa Rica.

These five, said the commission were responsible for building the arms network, which because of its cloak of secrecy, allowed traffickers to run cocaine to the United States.

The recent prosecutor's report enlarges the findings of American journalists Martha Honey and Tony Avirgan, who probed the bombing in 1984 and 1985. Hull sued the husband-and-wife investigative team in a Costa Rican court for libel, but lost.

The Christic Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based public law firm, took on the couple's investigation and sued Hull and 28 others over the La Penca bombing.

A Miami judge threw the suit out of court in 1988, a few days before the trial was to begin, declaring it was never proven that Galil was the bomber.